
COMMISSION ON AGING MEMBERS 2007

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Suzy Leahigh, 1st Vice Chair
Alan Kreger, 2nd Vice Chair
Sandra Sewell, Treasurer
James Mayo, Secretary

OFFICERS 2008

Irwin Goldbloom, Chair
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Communications and Community Outreach – Judith Jaffe
Access to Health Care – Andrea Lev
Public Policy – Mike Goldman

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Keith Fleeman, Dept. of Libraries
Les Kaplan, Housing Opportunities Commission
Calvin Green – DPWT
Pat Streeter – Dept. of Recreation

COMMISSION MEMBERS

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Danielle Benjamin	Suzy Leahigh
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Marvin Freedenberg	Andrea Lev
Barbara Glaser	Norman Locksley
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John Kenney, Exec. Liaison	Patrice Thomas
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COMMISSION ON AGING

The Commission on Aging, established in 1967, operated under the auspices of the County Council until August 1974, when its operation was transferred to the Executive Branch. Chapter 27, Article III of the Montgomery County Code establishes the powers and duties of the Commission on Aging. Section 27-34 states, "It is hereby declared to be the public policy of the county to promote and initiate programs to improve conditions of the aging or elderly in the county; to work toward elimination of restrictions which impede older citizens from full participation in the mainstream of community life; and to assist and stimulate all levels of government and the community to be more responsive to the needs of the county's older citizens." The Commission on Aging has a duty to advise and counsel the residents of the county, the County Council, the County Executive and the various departments of county, state and federal government on matters involving the needs of the aging.

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA), headed by Elizabeth Boehner, is responsible for assuring the provision of a continuum of home and community based services. The AAA is actively involved with community partners: collaborating with the Grass Roots Organization for the Well-being of Seniors (GROWS), administering county and state grant awards to contractors, training, public education/outreach, networking and referrals.

In 2007, the AAA undertook expansion of the Information and Assistance program by establishing a policy of having all phones answered by live staff (instead of by an answering machine), increasing the skill set of those assigned to answering calls from the public, and augmenting the number of staff in the Information and Assistance Unit. The Commission on Aging serves as the advisory board to the AAA as required by the Older Americans Act.

COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

The Commission on Aging consists of no fewer than 18 members appointed by the County Executive, subject to confirmation by the County Council. There are currently 26 members of the Commission. Members must be county residents of whom a majority shall be residents age 60 and older. Members include: those who participate in or who are eligible to participate in programs under the Older Americans Act, local elected officials or their designees, individuals who are or who have been active in government, business, industry, labor, community service, religious, social services, education, the professions and representatives of major organizations or agencies concerned with aging.

LIAISON ACTIVITIES

Consumer Advisory Committee to the In-Home Aide Services Program-Sandra Sewell
Transportation Committee for Seniors and People with Disabilities -

Judith Jaffe, and Danielle Benjamin

Public Guardianship Review Board-Elaine Hoover

Recreation Department Advisory Board-Suzy Leahigh

United Seniors of Maryland-Mike Goldman

Vital Living Montgomery Steering Committee-Ceceil Belong

Senior Plan Advisory Committee - David Richman

FY 08 BUDGET PRIORITIES

The Commission's priorities reflect its advocacy for the County to fund programs and services that help seniors to remain independent, optimize their self-sufficiency and enhance their coping skills. Transportation is a major obstacle for seniors who cannot drive. The social isolation associated with the inability to drive and lack of social contact is detrimental to physical and mental well-being. The Commission urges the County government to continue to augment its investment in senior transportation programs and services.

Department Of Health And Human Services

Social Services to Adults - \$635,000

Social Services to Adults (SSTA), provides assessment, crisis intervention and care management for persons 18 years of age and older who have physical and/or mental impairments including frail seniors, adults with disabilities and adults with disabilities at-risk of eviction or homelessness. Seventy-five percent of the clients are age 65 and older. The majority of clients earn less than 40% of the State's median income (\$17,136). Through care management assistance and the provision of multiple services these at-risk seniors and disabled adults are able to remain living in the community in relatively safe and healthy environments. Program outcome measures support the programs goals: Less than 1% of SSTA clients require a referral to Adult Protective Services; a minimum 80% of clients continue to live safely in the community one year after case management has been initiated; client satisfaction scores are 90%, clients obtain 5 support services/resources as a result of SSTA care management.

The SSTA program has lost 3.5 social workers since 2003. Two social work positions were redeployed to the Medical Assistance Waiver Program to meet cost-sharing requirements. 1.5 social work positions were reassigned to the Adult Protective Services Program to handle the increasing number of reports of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults. Currently, there are only 2 social workers available to perform assessments of new clients. As a result, the list of persons waiting for an assessment has soared from an average of 25 persons in 2003 to 246 persons as of August, 2006. SSTA has not received any new social work positions in eight years despite an ever increasing number of seniors in the county. The Commission on Aging seeks \$635,000 in FY08 to fund the following positions in the SSTA program: 6 social workers, 1 social work manager and 1 office services coordinator.

Department of Recreation

Senior Adult Programs – Increase Staffing at Senior Centers and Senior Community Programs - \$80,000

A full-time Recreation Coordinator position is requested for the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center. This center serves a minimum of 4,000 senior participants each month with a current staffing complement of 1 full-time Director and 3 part-time positions working 15, 18 and 20 hours per week.

ADA Compliant Sound Systems and Audio Equipment - \$40,000

These systems are needed for Holiday Park, Schweinhaut, Long Branch and Damascus Senior Centers.

Senior Centers and Community Recreation Facilities for Seniors

Establish a permanent, dedicated line item for the repair and maintenance of facilities with senior programs.

Department Of Public Works and Transportation

Call’N’ Ride - \$2.2M

Funds are requested to increase the income eligibility for the Call’N’Ride Program. The maximum allowable income at this time is \$20,000 for one person and \$25,100 for a couple. The Commission is recommending that the maximum income be raised to \$30,000 for an individual and \$40,000 for a couple. It has been over ten years since the income eligibility levels of the Call’N’Ride Program have been examined. Over that time, increases in the cost of living, energy, food and prescription medications have eaten away at the buying power of moderate income seniors. While the Federal Poverty Line is \$9,800 for an individual, the Community Action Board considers \$30,500 as the minimum standard of need for an individual adult residing in Montgomery County. Data provided by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, indicates that there are about 12,000 additional seniors age 67 and older who would be eligible for the Call’N’Ride Program at the proposed income levels. Based on the current rates of participation, a maximum participation rate of 25% or 3,000 seniors is assumed. This higher income group would have a co-pay of \$26.25 per \$56 coupon book; it is assumed that participants will purchase 2 books each month.

FY09 BUDGET PRIORITIES

Enabling its residents to “Age-in-Place” with dignity and respect is a county goal. The Commission believes that it takes the many components of the community working together – seniors, caregivers, local government, the non-profit and private sectors, to actualize “aging-in-place” in Montgomery County. Through its annual budget priorities the Commission seeks to assure that county services which support “aging-in-place” are sufficiently funded.

Department of Health and Human Services

Nutrition Services -- \$307,100

The Commission recommends a \$307,100 increase in the Senior Food Program budget to maintain its same level of service as in FY08 and to increase the number of home delivered meals and meals for ethnic communities. We want to ensure that seniors receive at least one hot meal each day and maintain social connectedness. The ethnic/cultural senior lunch programs are especially in need of funds to serve additional seniors. This activity is supportive of the aging in place concept.

Adult Day Centers Subsidy -- \$105,000

The Commission recommends an increase of \$105,000 for the Adult Day Care Program which provides family caregivers with financial support and respite from the care of their elderly family members. Implemented late in FY 2008, the program is successful. Information outreach about the program is already increasing demand for the services provided. This program helps to keep elders in the community and prevents caregiver burnout, a major cause of nursing home placement. The program is available to disabled adults as well as seniors.

Senior Mental Health -- \$550,000

In FY06, of the 7,179 individuals treated in the Montgomery County Public Mental Health System, only 91 were seniors (1.25%). The Commission is recommending a budget increase for Senior Mental health to support a Geriatric Behavioral Health Treatment Team for services for our low-income senior residents. These seniors find it especially difficult to pay for and obtain treatment for a mental health or substance abuse problem.

Assisted Living Subsidy Program -- \$284,330

The Commission is recommending additional \$284,330 for assisted living subsidies for low-income seniors who live in group homes for the frail elderly and adult foster care homes for frail seniors and adults with disabilities. This will fund 31 seniors currently on the subsidy waiting list and includes support for a .5WY Program Specialist II. While the subsidy is low, it helps maintain low-income family independence and in some instances keeps the senior from going on Medicaid and into a nursing home instead of remaining in the community.

FY07 COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is comprised of Commission Officers and standing committee chairs and vice-chairs. It develops the major priorities and provides direction to the Commission. The four standing committees identify service gaps and quality of care issues, conduct studies to address policy concerns and service barriers confronting seniors, and work to improve strategies for effective outreach about county services to seniors and their caregivers. The primary areas on which the Commission has been focusing with regard to County policy and budget are: 1) identifying services and resources needed for successful aging-in-place; 2) promoting stronger communication and program integration among the organizations responsible for programs designed to serve seniors, e.g., accessible public transportation to seniors, and 3) where resources are lacking, obtaining needed funding and policy support to reduce waiting lists for seniors eligible for services.

Access to Health Care Committee

In 2007, the committee set a goal of defining and addressing the needs of older patients at discharge from hospitals. Problems in this area had been raised to the committee in the past and recent studies underscored the need for improvement in discharge planning. These studies, funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, found that after discharge from a hospital in the U.S., 13% of patients require re-hospitalization and one in five suffer an adverse event. Many of these problems are due to inadequate post-discharge follow-up of patients' unresolved medical problems. To better understand the discharge experience in Montgomery County, the committee developed questions for patients and discharge planners and steps were taken to interview recently discharged senior patients.

The committee is planning to pursue this issue in 2008 through further discussion with key informants and interviews with hospital discharge planners.

A member of the Commission on Health participates on this committee. Efforts were undertaken in 2007 to increase interaction and collaboration with Montgomery Cares, as at least 20% of the clients served in these primary care clinics are age 55 and above.

Communications & Community Outreach Committee

This Committee plans and produces the Commission's County Cable Montgomery, Channel 6 television program, "Seniors Today: Resources for Vital Living." Eight programs are produced annually; each is shown daily for a month. A ninth program features the winners of the "Path of Achievement Awards" given to those who have made outstanding contributions as seniors in Montgomery County. Guests on Seniors Today have included County Executive Isiah Leggett, members of the County Council, Directors of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Recreation, and Fire and Rescue. The program seeks to highlight events of interest to the senior community

such as the 50+ Employment Expo, the Senior Arts Fair, the Senior Info/Expo; as well as services such as adult day centers, life long learning opportunities, consumer protection and health information. The committee assists with the writing and placement of press releases on events or lectures of interest to seniors.

Public Policy Committee

The Public Policy Committee focuses on budget and legislative priorities at the county and state levels. The committee continued to support the need for long-range strategic planning by both the county and state and has supported activities undertaken by Aging and Disability Services to follow through on recommendations of Phase I of the senior strategic plan activity completed in early 2007 and of Phase II completed in late 2007. Priorities at the county level have centered on in-home supports (such as chore services and the in-home aide program, as well as support to family caregivers (adult day-care and respite care), and additional senior program staff at senior and community centers. At the state level, the committee focused on maintaining Medicaid funding levels and ensuring that budget reductions being proposed for FY 09 do not harm senior programs which are already under-funded.

The committee will be undertaking an effort in 2008 focused on assisted living and support for aging in place for low-income seniors when they cannot continue to live independently.

Senior Services Oversight Committee

This Committee has examined quality and safety standards for assisted living facilities, with special attention to senior assisted living group homes. The committee met with the Director of the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality and staff to discuss the inspection schedule for small group homes. For Montgomery County, personnel in the county's Office of Licensing and Regulatory Services inspect 50 senior assisted living group homes, while staff from the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality inspects the remaining 90. As a result of the Commission's inquiry, the state and county have rectified their records and the state has given priority to inspecting those homes which have not been inspected in the past two years.

Committee members in collaboration with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, initiated a monthly column "Ask the Ombudsman" in the Senior Beacon newspaper. The purpose was to provide consumer advice on long-term care. This column won first place in the senior issues category from the North American Mature Publishers Association.

In addition, the Committee focused on the issues of property tax relief for senior home owners and adult day centers. A recommendation to create a Task Force to look into the issues of cost and access to adult day center services was accepted by the Commission.

FY07 SUMMER STUDY COMMITTEES

The topics for study are selected each year at the Annual May meeting of the Commission on Aging. Members of senior stakeholder organizations are invited to participate in the Commission's summer study committees.

In the summer of 2007, the Commission on Aging focused on:

The Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Budget Summer Study

This study group focused on gaining an understanding of the CIP process, the status of approved projects of concern to seniors, and opportunities for new senior related projects. The committee focused on projects in the FY09-14 CIP for the Department of Recreation.

In September the Commission advised the County Executive of its strong support for funding to complete the renovation of senior centers, the construction of new community centers with dedicated space for senior programs and the renovation of community centers with senior programs. The Commission placed very high priority on funds for design, development and construction at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center.

The Commission urged that there be no delay in the development and construction timeline for the following approved community recreation centers: Mid County, White Oak, and North Potomac. These facilities will maintain the health and well-being of seniors who participate in exercise, education, socialization and the nutrition programs.

In addition, the need for a new senior center in the City of Gaithersburg was brought to the attention of the Commission. The current center serves both the senior residents of Gaithersburg and nonresidents. The Department of Recreation provides funds to enable seniors who are not City residents to participate at this center. Nonresidents comprise 2/3 of those who attend this center. The Commission on Aging supports the construction of a new senior center in the City of Gaithersburg and urges continued County collaboration with the City of Gaithersburg in the design and construction of the new senior center, ensuring continued availability of the new Gaithersburg Senior Center to all seniors residing in the greater Gaithersburg/Germantown areas.

Housing/Supportive Services Summer Study

This study group explored the need for assisted living/supportive services for low-income seniors, who have aged-in-place in independent living settings through the auspices of the Housing Opportunity Commission (HOC). A survey of senior needs completed by HOC resident counselors, property managers and case managers in Aging and Disability Services was undertaken. The problems identified were many but dispersed throughout the county in such a way that a simple programmatic solution was not apparent. Rather, in 2008 this issue will be taken on by the Commission's public policy committee which will develop a recommendation for consideration.

Senior Mental Health Summer Study

This study group reviewed the current program and budget for DHHS senior mental health programs. Representatives from the Mental Health Advisory Committee and Commission on Persons with Disabilities participated in this summer study group. It was concluded that a significant need exists for access to treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems for uninsured, low-income seniors age 60 and older and low-income seniors whose sole insurer is Medicare. Of 340 persons treated by the Adult Behavioral Health Program in FY06, 6% were age 60-69 years and 3% were 70 years or older. In FY06, of the 7,179 individuals treated in the Montgomery County Public Mental Health System, 91 were seniors (1 ¼%). The underutilization of mental health services by seniors is not because seniors have fewer mental health problems than other age groups.

The study group recommended establishment of a specialized Geriatric Behavioral Health Treatment Team to expand the county's capacity to treat uninsured and low-income seniors. Team members would have training and experience in the diagnosis and treatment of co-occurring disorders in seniors. This team would serve the entire County and could be a mobile team offering service in senior centers, other community locations and in office settings. A budget priority for FY 09 of \$550,000 was proposed by this study group to meet this need.

Senior Nutrition Summer Study

The Senior Nutrition Summer Study Group reviewed the current program and budget for congregate, ethnic and home delivered meals. Anticipated cost per meal increases will require additional funds to maintain the same level of service. Concurrently, there is a need for further funding to meet increased need for ethnic meals. The study group focused on the need to ensure that seniors receive at least one hot meal each day and maintain social connectedness. The ethnic/cultural senior lunch programs are especially in need of funds to serve additional seniors. It was recommended that the nutrition program be identified to receive a FY 09 budget priority increase of \$307,100 in the Senior Food Program budget to maintain its same level of service at the congregate meal sites and to increase the number of home delivered meals and meals for ethnic communities.

ADULT DAY CENTER SERVICES TASK FORCE

The Commission on Aging established an Adult Day Center Services Task Force in 2007. Its objective was to explore the need for and utilization of Adult Day Centers Services by seniors and caregivers in Montgomery County.

Adult Day Centers Services provide care, support, and social activities for seniors who are frail and in need of social contacts and supervision during the day. Participants may have some dementia or mental decline. This service provides respite to caregivers who need a break from caring for a family member or enables the caregiver to be employed. This support service promotes aging in place, keeping the senior at home rather than

institutionalization. There are non-profit and private for-profit adult day centers in the County. They are a valuable resource, as, in most cases, they supply transportation, offer stimulation and socialization, provide health assessments and monitoring of medical conditions by registered nurses, provide good nutritional food, including a hot meal and snacks each day. Physical, speech and occupational therapy, social work, caregiver support groups as well as programs in Spanish, Russian and Korean, are provided by many centers.

These services enrich the quality of life and promote the independence of participants and their caregivers. Despite this fact the Task Force found that there is a lack of knowledge about adult day centers and that they are underutilized. The Commission believes that seniors and caregivers would benefit greatly from increased public awareness about the services available through adult day centers services.

The Task Force recommendations included: 1) requesting that education and outreach about adult day center services become a high priority for the caregiver support program of Aging and Disability Services; 2) updating print information on adult day centers and assure that its distribution is targeted to reach the population most likely to benefit from such information; 3) creating a subsidy program to assist those in need of this service, but who are unable to afford it. In this regard, the Commission was pleased by the inclusion in the fiscal '08 budget of \$105,000 for this purpose.

SENIOR VITAL LIVING

Finding a new direction, learning about all the possibilities, using your experience and knowledge and continuing to learn and grow are key elements of the Vital Living Philosophy. As a part of the Vital Living philosophy, and in conjunction with the Public Information Office, the commission has created a monthly cable television show called "Seniors Today." Each month there are lively and informative discussions with government officials, Authors, Artists, Community Leaders, senior advocates and seniors who are making a difference. Show times can be found at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/cable/site/programs>

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SENIORS

COMMISSION ON AGING
401 Hungerford Drive 4th floor
Rockville, MD 20852
240-777-1120 (voice)
240-777-1236 (TTY)
240-777-1436

AGING AND DISABILITY SERVICES
Information & Assistance Line
240-777-3000

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Easy access to information about all Montgomery
County Health and Human Services
240-777-1245
240-777-1295 TTY